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ABSTRACT

The reasons for withdrawal by students qualified to return to Bronx Community College (BCC) were studied. A short survey form consisting of three open-ended questions was sent to 153 of the dropouts, while a long form with about 30 objective questions was sent to 1,498 dropouts. Thirty-two responses to the short form and 250 responses to the long form revealed that financial pressures and personal, health, and family-related problems constituted a large majority of the reasons given by students for not returning to BCC. One-third of all responses related to the cost of college, the need for money, or a job; 26.9 percent of the students gave personal, family, health, marriage, and maternity reasons. About 17-20 percent of the remaining students cited academic difficulties, the need for tutoring and counseling, and unavailability of needed courses and schedules as reasons for withdrawing. About 22 percent of the dropouts intended to transfer to another school, and 15.3 percent actually enrolled in other schools (39 percent at private or public trade or career schools, 36 percent at four-year City University of New York colleges, and 23 percent at other community colleges). The 215 responses to a question about future plans indicated that almost 75 percent intended to re-enroll at BCC during the next 1 to 2 years. Students requested assistance with finances, financial aid counseling, fee payment flexibility, and more opportunities for employment. Course scheduling was a second major need area identified by students. (SW)

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SURVEY OF NON-RETURNING STUDENTS, Spring 1981

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INSTITUTE ON DESEGREGATION

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COOPERATIVE PROJECT

This paper has been identified by a joint project of The Institute on Desegregation at North Carolina Central University and ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education at George Washington University. The purposes of this project are to identify, collect, and make available literature concerned with

(1) the problems of minority students in higher education in general and
(2) the problems of desegregation in historically black colleges and universities in particular.

New published and unpublished materials are reviewed and recommended by participants of the Institute on Desegratation's Interinstitutional Research Group (ID/IRG) for acquisition by ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education. An annual bibliography of this material will be published under the names of ERIC and the Institute.

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Survey of Non-Returning Students
Spring, 1981

Norman Eagle

A. Purpose

The purpose of this survey was to determine the major reasons why eligible students did not return to B.C.C. for the Spring, 1981 semester, and to elicit suggestions from these students as to how the College could have helped them remain in attendance.

B. Procedure

This survey was undertaken by the Office of Institutional Research on the initiative of the Dean of Academic Affairs. The Dean provided name and address labels of all students shown by Computer Center records to be enrolled at B.C.C. during the Fall, 1980 semester, who did not graduate, and who did not return to B.C.C. for the Spring, 1981 semester despite being eligible to do so.

In order to test the effects of the length of the survey instrument on the return rate, two forms of the survey were designed. A long form consisted of approximately 30 answer opportunities in mainly objective form on both sides of an 8½ x 11 page, while a short form consisted of only three open ended questions on one side of an 8½ x 11 page. A 10% sample (N=153) of the total number of qualified non-returning students constituted the short form sample, while 1,498 non returning students were sent the long form.

Each envelope contained a letter from the Dean explaining the purpose and importance of the survey, and a self addressed, postage-free return envelope.

The forms were mailed on May 12, and a three week period was allowed for receipt of the returns.

C. Description of Sample

Of the 1,498 long forms and 153 short forms mailed, 119 and 11 respectively were returned as undeliverable. Of the long forms assumed to have reached their destination, 250 responses were received (18%), whereas of the short forms assumed to have reached their destination 32 responses were received (23%). While the return rate for the short form proved somewhat higher than the long form rate, the additional information provided by the long form more than compensated for the difference in response rate and justified the decision to use the long form.

Table 1 (A,B,C) describes the sample of 239 students returning mailed forms in terms of curriculum, sex, and year of entry. While the distributions of characteristics of the non-returning student population are not known, it may be seen that the curriculum distribution of the sample closely parallels the curriculum distribution of enrolled students in the Fall 1980 semester, that is, in the semester from which these students did not return to the college. The tables suggest that business administration students and females may be moderately over-represented in the sample though this observation is based on a comparison with the Fall 1980 enrollment, and not with the actual distribution of the non-returnee population. Half of the respondees entered B.C.C. within the past two years while 20% entered prior to Fall 1977 (Table 1C).

D. Results

The following analysis is based on the information contained in the 239 valid long forms of the survey questionnaire received up to three weeks following the mailing.

With regard to Q1., 'What was the single most important reason you did not return to B.C.C. this semester?', it may be seen that one-third of all responses relate to the cost of college, the need for money or a job. An additional 26.9% of the students give personal, family, health, marriage and maternity related reasons. Together, these two categories of reasons comprise 60% of all the 'single most important' reasons given by the respondees. Approximately 17%-20% of the remaining students give reasons which are within the purview of the college, i.e., academic difficulties and the need for tutoring and counselling, unavailability of needed courses and schedule, other registration or records problems.

From these data we estimate that approximately one-fourth of the non-returning students attribute their failure to re-enroll to conditions over which the College might have some control.

A confirmation of the primacy of financial pressure and personal problems in causing students to interrupt their attendance at B.C.C. is seen in the ratings awarded by the students to nineteen categories of reasons for discontinuing their enrollment at B.C.C. The proportions of students describing each of these nineteen reasons as 'very important' in their decision not to re-enroll are shown in the table for Question 4. It may be seen that 'personal, family, or health problems' heads the ranked-order list, followed by 'needed income-job' and

'could not afford costs.' The unavailability of courses or the inability to construct an acceptable schedule are endorsed as 'very important' by about one-third of the students. Experiences with counselors, administrators, and instructors are seen to be of only marginal importance while experiences with other students are seen as of little importance. On the other hand, approximately one fifth of the students cite the neighborhood around the college or the inconvenience of the college location as very important.

The table also reveals that a significant segment of the students (21.5%) left B.C.C. with the intention of transferring to another school. Question 5 directly addresses this issue by asking whether students are currently enrolled in another school or college. The results, seen in the table for Question 5, show that 15.3% of the respondees are, in fact, enrolled elsewhere. An analysis of the 31 institutions named by students as receiving institutions shows that 39% are private or public trade or career schools, 36% are four year C.U.N.Y. colleges and 23% are other community colleges (Hostos and Manhattan, 16%; Westchester C.C., 6%). Examination of the program followed by thirteen of the transferring students shows that most of the programs are also offered by B.C.C. (i.e., nursing, medical assitant, business, engineering, accounting, computer science, early childhood, secretarial studies, liberal arts). It appears that at least some of these transferring students felt that they could better pursue their educational goals at a more foscused career school on the one hand, or at a more comprehensive four year college, on the other.

While a moderate tendency to transfer exists, the intention or inclination of non returning students to re-enroll in B.C.C. is much stronger. This is revealed in the table for Question 2 where it is seen that nearly 75% of the 215 students responding state that it is their intention to re-enroll in B.C.C. during the next year or two. While some differences in the strength of this inclination among the

curriculum groups may be suggested by the data, the small size of many of the groups precludes clear inferences of curriculum group differences. However, the over-all proportion (75%) attests to the generally positive attitude which the non-returning students have toward the College and suggests that with appropriate out-reach and assistance a significant number of these students might re-enroll.

The nature of the assistance requested by the students is shown in the tables for Questions 3 and 7. It is not surprising that problems involving college costs and financial aid are near or at the top of the lists. Students request more financial aid counselling, help in filling out the applications, interim coverage for delayed financial grants, fee payment flexibility, and opportunities for more income through grants or employment. A second major area of assistance requested by the students is that relating to the unavailability of needed courses or the inability to fit needed courses into an acceptable schedule. Students request opportunities to select from a greater array of sections, even if these are in the evenings or Saturdays. Their frustration is seen in the moderately strong position in both tables (Q3 and Q7) of requests for more academic, curriculum, and course selection counselling. The problem of constructing acceptable schedules is probably compounded by the fact that most students at B.C.C. have employment as well as school responsibilities, and many have family responsibilities as well. These 'external' responsibilities restrict student flexibility in the construction of workable schedules.

Table Q3. lists twenty-one recommendations put forward by indvidual students. These range from providing a shelter for the bus stop on University Avenue to protecting welfare payments from the BEOG award. While each of these recommendations was put forward by only one or two percent of the sample, each one

may represent as many as ten or twenty students, and these may sum to between 200-400 students in the total population of non-returning students. It would, therefore, be appropriate for the College to identify the problem areas over which it can exercise some control and to act upon those student recommendations which appear to have good chances of affecting student 'drop-out' decisions.

A spin-off of this survey was the collection of names and addresses of students requesting information on summer and fall registration, financial aid, and curriculum. The names and addresses of over 150 former students were forwarded to the Dean of Students within 48 hours of receipt. Presumably students received the needed information within a week of their request.

E. Conclusions

Financial pressures and personal, health, and family related problems constitute a large majority of the reasons given by students for not returning to B.C.C. It would seem, therefore, that increased economic and social pressures, such as a reduction in the availability of financial assistance or reduction in other social services would have a significant impact on our particularly vulnerable student body.

It is estimated that approximately one quarter to one third of the students attribute their leaving B.C.C. to problems which can be addressed by the College (i.e., course unavailability, need for tutoring).

While a moderate tendency to transfer is revealed, the over-all perception of the College by a strong majority of the students appears positive, as indicated by the large proportion of students citing their intention to return to B.C.C. in the next year or two. Many specific student recommendations for College action to help students stay in College are listed. Outreach and other programs of assistance would seem to be called for.

Table 1. Description of Sample

A. Curriculum	n in sample	% of total	% Fall '80
Liberal Arts	46	19.2	18.2
Nursing-Pre Nursing	42	17.6	20.5
Business Administration	35	14.6	8.9
Secretarial Studies	22	9.2	9.4
Data Processing	22	9.2	6.3
Electrical & Mechanical Tech.	15	6.3	6.2
Education Assoc. (Child Care)	10	4.2	5.4
Engineering Science	8	3.3	4.1
Medical Lab Tech.	8	3.3	5.9
Other or missing	31	13.0	15.2
	239	99.9	100.1

B. Sex	n	%	% Fall '80
Male	73	30.9	36.6
Female	163	69.1	63.4
(missing)	(3)		
	236	100.0	100.0

C.

Year of Entry	n	% of total
1980	69	30.7
1979	46	20.4
1978	41	18.2
1977	23	10.2
1976	8	3.5
1975	11	4.9
1974	9	4.0
1973	5	2.2
Earlier than 1973	13	5.8
	225	99.9

Q1. What was the single most important reason you did not return to B.C.C. this semester?

(Open ended)

Reason	n	percent
cost, financial, or job related	75	33.0
personal, family, health, marriage, maternity	61	26.9
academic difficulties	10	4.4
completed course(s) needed	8	3.5
could not get needed course(s)	7	3.1
could not get needed schedule	6	2.6
registration problems	6	2.6
college neighborhood or inconvenient college location	5	2.2
Other (moved, housing problem, quality of standards, robbed, transfer, no H.S. diploma, English language difficulty, wanted senior college, disappointed with education, work long hours, incomplete records, needed counseling, needed baby sitter, rejected remedial or entrance requirements, lacked time, unavailability of tutors, changed job hours, joined armed forces,...)	49	21.6
	227	99.9

Q2. Do you plan to return to B.C.C. within the next year or two?

Curriculum	n responding	n Yes	% Yes
Secretarial Studies	22	20	90.9
Medical Lab Tech	8	7	87.5
Liberal Arts	46	35	76.1
Engineering Science	8	6	75.0
Nursing-Pre Nursing	42	31	73.8
Business Administration	35	25	71.4
Data Processing	22	15	68.2
Education Associate (Child Care)	9	5	55.6
Electrical and Mechanical Tech.	15	8	53.3
Other	8	8	100.0
	215	160	74.4

Q3. Could B.C.C. have done anything last semester which would have helped you return this semester?

Recommendations of seventy-two students not returning for the Spring 1981 semester.

Recommendations	n	% of total
1. Expedite receipt of TAP & BEOG approval, or provide other financial aid.	11	19.3
2. Schedule needed courses in evening and Saturdays, example: engineering, music, swimming.	9	12.5
3. Establish some kind of credit bureau to cover student costs, or provide for installment payment of fees or similar plan.	7	9.7
4. Improve counselling with regard to courses and pre-requisites.	5	6.9
5. Expand course choices and section availability; improve schedules.	4	5.6
6. Provide advance and better advisement on financial aid procedures.	3	4.2
7. Improve efficiency of registration system.	3	4.2
8. Provide more day care help and lower age requirement.	3	4.2
9. Make possible deferral of payments due until after registration, or until BEOG and TAP are received.	2	2.8
10. Show greater leniency for approved withdrawal from classes during a semester;	2	2.8
make hardship waivers easier to obtain.	1	1.4
11. Provide part-time employment.	2	2.8
12. Provide counselling for part time students, especially in math labs.	1	1.4
13. Provide bus stop shelter from rain-snow.	1	1.4
14. Provide guidance on how to appeal contested grade.	1	1.4
15. Greater counselor effort to help students remain in school.	1	1.4

Q3. (continued)

Recommendations	n	% of total
16. Raise standards.	1	1.4
17. Remove remedial requirements.	1	1.4
18. Show more sensitivity to students and their problems;	1	1.4
with reference to treatment of minorities.	1	1.4
19. Make general counselling more available and accessible especially at critical times.	1	1.4
20. Give freshmen a better chance of enrolling in courses they want and need.	1	1.4
21. Protect welfare payments from BEOG award.	1	1.4
22. Courses available mostly in the evenings should also be scheduled for day session, i.e., engineering.	1	1.4
23. Provide more tutoring;	1	1.4
more evening tutoring.	1	1.4
24. Improve safety and security of the neighborhood.	1	1.4
25. Provide a more thorough orientation.	1	1.4
26. Offer a better ESL program;	1	1.4
a better acting class;	1	1.4
courses in school records and accounts.	1	1.4
27. Improve course and schedule guide.	1	1.4

Q4. The following are some reasons why some students leave college for a while. Rate the importance of each reason in influencing you not to return to B.C.C. this semester.

Reason	n responding	n awarding rating 4 or 5, (Very Important)	Percent awarding rating 4 or 5, (Very Important)
personal, family or health problems	207	119	57.5
needed income-job	179	96	53.6
could not afford costs	185	82	44.3
could not get needed time schedule	182	72	39.6
could not get needed courses	179	59	33.0
completed the courses you wanted to	170	51	30.0
grades were not as good as expected	179	53	29.6
needed time to think about career or changing curriculum	176	46	26.1
to continue education elsewhere	177	38	21.5
inconvenience of getting to B.C.C.	179	36	20.1
college neighborhood	174	30	17.2
lost interest in school	174	29	16.7
experiences with B.C.C. counselors	178	28	15.7
experiences with B.C.C. administrators	175	25	14.3
experiences with B.C.C. teachers	181	23	12.7
B.C.C. standards too low	173	22	12.7
moved	169	18	10.7
B.C.C. standards too high	156	9	5.8
experiences with other B.C.C. students	174	10	5.7

Q5. Are you now enrolled in another School or College?

Curriculum	n responding	n Yes	% Yes
Education Associate (Child Care)	10	4	40.0
Elec or Mech Tech.	15	5	33.3
Liberal Arts	46	9	19.6
Nursing or Pre Nursing	42	6	14.3
Engineering Science	8	1	12.5
Medical Lab Tech.	8	1	12.5
Business Administration	35	4	11.4
Secretarial Studies	22	2	9.1
Data Processing	22	1	4.5
Other	8	0	0.0
	216	33	15.3

Q6. Do you want to receive any of the following information from B.C.C.?

Type of Information	n Yes	% Yes
registration for Summer or Fall	159	66.5
curriculum	130	54.3
financial	116	48.5

Q7. Is there anything we at B.C.C. can do now to help you return to College?

Student recommendations	n	% of total
1. send curriculum, course, registration information	17	23.3
2. provide financial aid or help obtain job	14	19.2
3. provide financial aid information and counselling	10	13.7
4. provide more evening and Saturday courses-schedules	6	8.2
5. provide academic-curriculum counselling	5	6.8
6. improve registration	3	4.1
7. adjust personal grade or give another opportunity to take test or course	3	4.1
8. provide personal counseling	2	2.7
9. offer needed courses in engineering, science, math.	2	2.7
10. help get job in nursing field for experience	1	1.4
11. insure accuracy of registration information sent to new students.	1	1.4
12. eliminate remedial requirements, especially if one passes college level courses	1	1.4
13. provide in day session course(s) given mainly at night.	1	1.4
14. baby sitting.	1	1.4
15. increase number of courses at union site.	1	1.4
16. improve safety and appearance of neighborhood.	1	1.4
17. give degree credit for remedial courses.	1	1.4
18. clear up personal financial debt claimed by BCC	1	1.4
19. provide tutoring	1	1.4
20. confirm personal leave of absence to avoid problem at registration.	1	1.4
Total	73	100.2